

"Demonstration Projects of Social Needs
and
Methods of Social Intervention"

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Social intervention is a general term for a process which can be engaged in, as it is, by many professions. Because this is a social work conference, I am taking for granted that a particular type of social intervention into the problems which endanger and plague the human beings in our society, is to be emphasized; i.e., specifically social work intervention.

Since "intervention" means any interference which affects others, even social casework with families and individuals might be considered a method of social work intervention. The title of this paper, however, "Demonstration Projects of Social Needs and Methods of Social Intervention" suggests a concern here today with a broader concept of social work intervention to which that loose term, "social action" has been, in the past, applied. Since the process of social action, also, like that of social intervention can and should be engaged in by many others than social workers, an effort to define social work intervention as I conceive it seems in order.

I would describe it as a planned process of interference with a single condition or cluster of conditions which are, or possess the potential for, affecting adversely the social adaptation of particular groups of people whose common plight is reflective of a broad social need; and to interfere in such a way that the offending conditions are, in fact, corrected. Offending conditions may involve only change in the policies and practices of institutions serving the people, but often such conditions involve a change in the behavior and attitudes of the people themselves, and the interaction taking place between the people and their institutions. When the latter is true, the total situation needs to be considered as a psychosocial entity where, as in casework practice with families, such matters as role and balance are paramount considerations, both diagnostically and in planning and implementing a service program. The total effect of service should be that of enhancing the community's autonomy and furthering its ability to face and master its own problems with a decreasing need for professional help. Implicit in this definition is a special way of gathering and using social data, a special way of working with the people in the community and the community's institutions and a special commitment to participate actively in the implementation of findings and recommendations.

If the family agency views its responsibility for social work intervention broadly to include the study of and the search for solutions to those social problems of the community for which social work education and experience can provide a particularly vital dimension and competence it most desirably should set up a structure which makes it possible for its actions to be properly timed, factually correct, logically sound,

and capable of implementation. It, therefore, should be ready to seek out actively for investigation, community conditions which impair social mental and physical health. To borrow from the writings of my department head, the director of the public affairs program in the Community Service Society, which I may do from time to time throughout this paper, the family agency which seriously and extensively wishes to engage in the practice of social work intervention must set up a structure which enables it to "be a prospector of problems, alert to the undisclosed presence of (those) wanting solution; an analyst at liberty to plunge into the muddle of things, make inquiries and propose ways to surmount community difficulties; a speculator able to risk capital on explorations of new knowledge and on innovating enterprises; a pacemaker for standards of service and training for service; a contingency fund of social responsibility or a reserve power in the community, rising to the task of dealing with special circumstances of particular groups...; a critic of existing community inadequacies and a gadfly pricking community sensibilities..."¹

A structure which contains such a program should, ideally, have a staff with more than the usual social work qualifications. Its staff should be not only specifically and well trained professionally and technically but should have a broad concept of social work and social welfare. Considerable technical skill is a desirable asset even in the determination of with which groups, with which events and at what point in time social work intervention should take place. The entire process of social work intervention requires a high degree and quality of self-awareness and control, if diagnostic and predictive judgment, and an able estimate of the most desirable method of intervention--a skill much greater than is recognized by most agencies and most social workers expressing an interest in this area of practice. These attributes as we have observed our practice, are perhaps of even greater importance in the diagnosis of community problem and the selection and implementation of a service method than they are in casework practice with an individual client or family situation. All of the unrecognized and unresolved problems and defenses of worker, such as a need to control, project, displace, and rationalize, are less accessible to supervision and can more easily run rampant in the process of helping the community when compared to helping the individual or family. Our experience suggests that curriculum planning in the schools of social work for the future training of those entering the field of social work intervention, should fully take these considerations into account.

In its Scope and Methods Report of 1953, an FSAA Committee refers to "the improvement of social conditions" as one of the "traditional functions" of the family service/^{and} places it second, if not equal, in importance, to the provision of direct casework service. At the same time it stresses "the importance of keeping the direct casework service program clearly in the pivotal position in the agency's program...partly because of the wide range of activities discussed in the Report and also because the Report outlines possible extensions of program..." "Three functions" the Report says, which "have been added to the traditional ones of casework and community leadership, (the latter term is alternately interchanged in the Report with the terms "improvement of social conditions" and "participation in community planning") are "not necessarily proposals for new activities but five administrative

1. Fisher, Bernard G., unpublished and unavailable document, "Promise, Promise and Program", pp. 28, 29.

recognition to ones that are already a part of the program in many agencies."² Cites as more recently added to the traditional functions of family agencies are group education, professional education, and research. The Scope and Methods Report further comments upon the differences of opinion that may arise as to priorities and program emphases and points out that these can be resolved constructively only "to the extent that the agency engages in responsible study of the various aspects of its program, to the degree to which democratic processes operate within the agency, and the strength of the convictions held by all persons associated with the agency about the purpose of the family agency movements."³ Aside from the fact that I know of few voluntary family agencies that meet the essential criteria of structure and staffing, which I first set forth as necessary in social work is to engage in any systematic and consistent manner, to implement this "traditional function of improving social conditions," how do I know about agencies that periodically and with adequate research tools, examine all aspects of their current programs, to reappraise their activities and existing social conditions. Nor do I even believe that the 1953 Scope and Methods Committee was, with any conviction, recommending its own recommendations, for how would an agency know without some kind of periodic, intensive scrutiny of its activities, that the direct casework service program as traditionally conceived should always and forever stand in "the pivotal position (of) the family agency's program."

In 1958 and 1959, the CSS conducted a study of its own program and the health and welfare needs of New York City, with a view to determining the most effective ways to utilize its own staff and services in the face of the almost overwhelming number and variety of problems found in a large urban area. Despite growth in the city's wealth, by the very nature and extent of the human needs uncovered, the community's difficulties in maintaining its voluntary health and welfare services, stood out with bold and chilling clarity.⁴ The problems uncovered were not new to those on the voluntary family agencies' "firing lines," nor have they since been reduced. Instead, they increase daily to a staggering degree. With human needs increasing and voluntary contributions less and less able to meet them, the study revealed the public treasury to be a rising source of the operational costs of the voluntary agencies. In the face of never ending pressures from everywhere to do more, this is indeed a tempting, easily rationalized, "seeming" solution to the preservation of the existence of the voluntary agency.

In weighing the results of the findings of its Searchlight study, the CSS chose a somewhat different course. One of the resulting major decisions was to expand its public affairs program (for over 50 years a small but significant structure for social work intervention). Using authority deriving from its charter, the Society was in essence saying, the ...old days are not gone forever; all things are not good and may not be for many years; we must return with present day technical knowledge, to fulfill the concern which motivated our forebearers,--the improvement of social conditions--the provision of services to troubled families will, not alone, remedy pervasive community problems. Another major decision was a declaration of its belief that for its regular, ongoing services to families, the acceptance of public monies, was

2. Scope and Methods, Report of an FSAA Committee, FSAA publication, 1953.
3. Ibid.
4. Searchlight on New York, aCSS publication, 1960.

undermining to the full development of public welfare programs, was not consonant with the 1956 amendments as well as, with few exceptions, to the 1962 amendments to the Social Security Act, limited the relative freedom of the voluntary family agency to speak and act independently, since, of necessity governmental bodies tend to demand some obedience and control. While the Society did not restrict the use of public monies for time-limited demonstration projects--now lodged primarily in the Department of Public Affairs--, it has exercised the utmost caution that no public grants for projects contain any contractual sections which would interfere with the Society's right to report openly and responsibly, to see that the recommendations based on its findings are given cognizance by public officials, and its right to use whatever methods it considers appropriate to insure the incorporation of its recommendations into the policies and practices of public programs.

In the expansion of its Department of Public Affairs, to place a heavier emphasis, in a variety of ways, on the improvement of community conditions, there was added to the Department's already existing functional divisions of Housing and Correction, the following: a division on Physical and Mental Health, Family and Child Welfare, on Aging, Youth (the latter incorporated Correction as well) and on Family Life Education. A board appointed lay committee was organized for each functional division, and although essentially each was responsible to an overall Committee on Public Affairs on which Committee chairmen serve, considerable freedom of independent action in its own right for each committee was encouraged, once the Committee developed some knowledge and expertise in its own field. All committees were assigned a staff service worker and all were charged with acting on local, state and, on occasion, federal legislation, in their appropriate areas, with identifying public issues and unmet needs, establishing priorities for study and action, and determining the type of action required. The latter, included when necessary, the development of time-limited demonstration projects. The projects were to be aimed at conditions affecting entire groups of people and experimentation with remedies which, hopefully, would improve the services of the public institutions serving large segments of the population. Since research in social work is still not commonly built into demonstration projects in family agency so that some proof of the effectiveness or lack of effectiveness of service methods is available, it was expected that most of the projects would be subjected to as rigorous research as was possible and necessary. Finally, the findings were not only to be reported, but the recommendations implemented, with staff help, by those increasingly knowledgeable functional committees. Where subject matter was of concern to more than one committee, joint subcommittees were to be appointed to take responsibility for the project or action, follow its progress, and recommend action to the larger committees.

Obvious in the structure, placing so much responsibility, in the final analysis, in the heads and hands of the functional committees, it was intended to expand and deepen the knowledge and understanding our citizen committees, to obligate them to develop recommendations based on the findings of the projects, and accordingly, a program of action and implementation. Experience has demonstrated that with this kind of informed citizen leadership and continuous follow-up, which includes work with public officials, testimony before the Board of Estimate, the City Council, City Planning Commission, legislative committees, and a wide variety of unofficial contacts as well, "knowledge is not power," and "a single volley,"--a Report--"may as well not have been fired."

An example of a completed series of demonstration projects aimed at highlighting the social problems, issues and possible solutions to the City's then current policies, procedures and practices in relocating families from public housing sites should illustrate this point. Working closely with Public Affairs Committee on Housing, the predecessor to the present Committee on Family and Child Welfare engaged in two time limited experiments in the use and application of casework principles and concepts in applying NYC Housing Authority's criteria for social eligibility for the admission of families on sites for public housing.⁶ Consistent follow-up of the findings and recommendations through official and informal contact with Housing Authority representatives by both staff and Committee members, testimony by both before the City Council and Board of Estimate, resulted not only in significant changes in the Housing Authority's relocation procedures, practices and financial benefits provided to site occupants but also in the creation of the Housing Authority's own Social Consultation Unit for tenant selection and continued occupancy. It should be noted that such gains are rarely achieved singlehandedly nor are they always free of at least temporary sullies or breaches in what one might term positive relationships between voluntary and city institutions. These studies, nonetheless, led the City to request and finance a demonstration project, under the Society's auspices, aimed at the examination of the City's Department of Real Estate's relocation policies and practices involving families being displaced for public improvements; e.g., schools, city hospitals and other such needed public facilities.⁷

This study resulted not only in significant changes in relocation procedures and practices, but in New York City's decision to separate completely the process of relocation, of necessity a program concerned with people, from the Department of Real Estate, a program concerned essentially with site clearance and with building maintenance and sales. New York City now has a separate Department of Relocation, which includes a Bureau of Social Service. Officially, at least, this Department is oriented to the welfare of the people on the sites, making possible the social services necessary for those who need them to remain in the area, and relocating, with social work help in adapting to their new environments, those who do not wish to or who are not able to stay. In concept, if not yet in extensive practice,--a far cry from the earlier "get lost" attitude which rid the sites of people no matter how or where, and past indifference to even the barest maintenance of the buildings in which people lived while awaiting whatever change in living arrangements they had to make. These changes, like the others were the result of continuous follow-up by staff and the Family and Child Welfare and Housing Committees jointly, with public officials, individually, and testimony before the City Council and Board of Estimate.

Experimentation in the adaptation of the principles and concepts of our knowledge of the diagnosis and treatment of individuals and families to the diagnosis and selection of the form of social work intervention, as we work with whole communities and neighborhoods, has led to one of the most fascinating methodological developments in demonstration projects made possible under the Society's new structure. This, along with our explicit responsibility for the transferability and implementation of our findings to public programs carrying responsibility for a

6. Not Without Hope, CSS publication, 1957, Taft Site Study, East Harlem Council, unpublished, 1959

7. A Demonstration Project in Relocation, CSS publication, 1961

much greater number of New York City's population than any voluntary agency could conceivably accommodate, imposes both a great burden and an unusual challenge. I have time for only a brief example.

The Society's East Harlem Demonstration Center was set up late on 1960, with "seed" financing from the agency, following one of our Board appointed lay committee's documented study of the East Harlem community, its resources and needs. The report of the committee contained the following statement of the problem and the committee's conclusions. The problem was this summarized:

"The private family agency, confronted by a community like East Harlem, faces the dilemma of deciding not only in what way it can help, but also to what extent. The social, emotional, and health needs in East Harlem are so extensive that the entire staff of the CSS, if it were available, could not encompass and meet them. What ways of extending help, then, would have value to us and the community, for demonstration purposes, and might provide guide lines for our own future program and for the programs of other public and private agencies?"

Among the conclusions reached were, first, that to participate vitally in East Harlem's development as a stable community requires more than the traditional individual and group services ordinarily provided by case and group work agencies; second, the services traditionally provided have not systematically and significantly identified and developed potential leadership in East Harlem, nor have they given appropriate direction to the leadership that is there; and, third, appropriate community treatment methods needed to be devised, developed, implemented and transmitted to the proper governmental and professional authorities if a sound solution to the problems with which East Harlem struggles is to be found.

Concurrent with the committee's study, the staff was re-examining its casework and group therapy practice with East Harlem's families and children.

To understand fully the findings of both the committee and staff, some description of East Harlem in 1960 is necessary. East Harlem is that section of the upper East side of Manhattan often referred to as Spanish Harlem. Its population of some 200,000 was composed roughly of 42% Puerto Ricans, 18% Negroes, and 40% Italian and other white, non-Puerto Ricans. The problems of East Harlem had become a matter of public health concern, since they were infectious and communicable both within and outside the area. Its population was predominantly composed of those who were highly deprived socially and culturally. It was known that as a community it was disorganized, that portions of its population were highly mobile, and that it had one of the City's highest rates of delinquency and crime, including the narcotics trade, a high incidence of significant health problems such as tuberculosis, prenatal problems and infant mortality, and high percentage of school "dropouts" and trade school attendants. Of its fourteen elementary schools, all but three were seriously over-enrolled, while four out of six of its junior high schools were under-enrolled--likewise was its only academic senior high school. The I.Q.'s of East Harlem's children dropped steadily from 88.2 in the third grade to 80.8 in the eighth,

in contrast to those of New York City as a whole, which steadily rose between the third and eighth grades from 98.8 to 103.4. Reading and arithmetic performance levels dropped accordingly, again, as those for the City as a whole rose. By the time East Harlem's children reached the eighth grade, their reading grade level was at 5.6 and their arithmetic grade level at 6.2, whereas for New York City as a whole the average eighth grade reading level was 8.2 and arithmetic was 8.3. Figures from three (or one-half) of East Harlem's junior high schools in May, 1960, showed that 70% of the students were reading more than one year below grade, and an additional 10% were one year below. Teacher turnover was estimated to be at least twice as high for East Harlem schools as for New York City as a whole, and many teachers were teaching subjects for which they were not licensed. Of 179 teachers appointed to positions in East Harlem, only 79 had accepted their appointments.

In spite of its many low-rent housing projects, the majority of East Harlem's population lived in slum or near slum conditions. Low-rent public housing not only left unsolved East Harlem's families' housing problems, but it created problems in its own wake. Properties adjoining public housing had deteriorated rather than improved, and the location of so many low-rent public projects in one vicinity had resulted in excessive in and out migration and created a "ghetto-like" stratification of the population.

With few exceptions, East Harlem was an area "done for" rather than learning to do for itself. It was a community to which many services had been brought, in which many methods had been tried. Despite this, relatively little scientific knowledge had been gained about the most effective and efficient ways of helping. An analysis of activity group therapy practice for East Harlem children and adult group therapy for a group of East Harlem mothers reflected the significant need for modification of traditional group therapy methods for people as socially and emotionally deprived as these.^{9, 10} Also, a small study of a random sample of cases coming psychiatric consultation from the family service unit covering not only East Harlem, but the silk stocking, Yorkville district to its south, was undertaken in an effort to determine what cluster of factor suggested the need for direct psychiatric versus casework treatment. East Harlem's families presented the characteristics described by Heinz Hartman in his concept of "living below an average expectable environment;" in other words, the interaction between these deprived, underdeveloped egos and their depriving pathological environment had created an apathy, withdrawal and inertia which seemed to us at least, to make them accessible only to the most nurturing, reaching-out, supportive and expensive family casework.¹¹

8. New York City Board of Education, Bureau of Educational Research, Report on Mayor's Meeting with East Harlem, 1960
9. Scheidlinger, S. "Experimental Group Treatment of Severely Deprived Latency-Age Children," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. XXX, No. 2, April, 1960
10. Scheidlinger, S. and Pyrke, Marjorie. "Group Therapy with Women with Severe Dependency Problems," American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, Vol. XXI, No. 4, October, 1951.
11. McCabe, et al. "Factors Influencing the Selection of Clients for Psychiatric or Casework Treatment." Paper presented at C.S.S. Professional Conference, November, 1958. Social Casework, April 1959. Vol. XL, No. 4.

What other forms of social work intervention then, could we conceive that might more effectively reverse the tide of deprivation and deterioration, that would have an impact on larger segments of the community. East Harlem was unquestionably a prototype of the troubled and troublesome sections of other urban communities. A microscope on East Harlem strongly suggested some significant relationship between the physical and social depression of the environment and the people themselves,-- their self concepts, their attitudes toward their neighbors, the neighborhood, and the city as a whole. Just as in individual treatment treatment the client must feel or be helped to feel dissatisfied with some aspect of his life, so must the "community client." What then was the point of entry--the crucial, overall pressure points with which there was a reasonable expectation that the community felt or could be helped to feel dissatisfied and what form of social work intervention would be most appropriate? The effect of school "drop outs" on talent loss, loss of community leadership, unemployment and delinquency was an agreed upon deep concern of East Harlem's leaders, its social service network, and the CSS staff and Committee. Another agreed upon concern was the social and economic imbalance of the community created by the many low-rent public housing projects built in the area,--a condition which would worsen markedly if privately owned residential properties were allowed to further deteriorate. A third concern, perhaps more the Society's and the schools' than the other self-sufficient portion of East Harlem's community, was with the needed upgrading of the public welfare program, particularly as it affected East Harlem's families with dependent children. Demonstration projects attempting to study, serve, and find remedies for these conditions were therefore, developed: the first in cooperation with the New York City Board of Education, the second, with the New York City Housing and Urban Redevelopment Board, and the third, with the Department of Welfare.

On the basis of our experience as caseworkers in the treatment of East Harlem's families and children as well as our knowledge of the literature in the use of group treatment with socially deprived families and children, a decision was made to take a calculated risk on the use, essentially, of group methods in all of East Harlem's projects. These groups run the continuum, from those which are largely educational and task oriented, to discussion groups, to those which are closer to frank therapy. Research is built into each project. Among the issues being examined are the methods of social work intervention themselves, the degree to which they are or are not successful, their cost as services, and of the greatest importance, their transferability to the city's public institutions, departments, and agencies.

The role of the social worker in such endeavors is a many faceted one -- he is, indeed, a generalist. He must be a skilled practitioner in individual and, hopefully, in group treatment as well, an objective research interviewer, a personable to view the community and its problems with understanding but without subjectivity, one especially able to conceptualize, transmit, and teach in every appropriate form, that which is to be incorporated into the practice of public departments. As in casework practice, if growth of the client takes place, the social worker must be enabling and facilitating without being directive and controlling except when "a clear and present danger" to the group (or client) exists. A massive, narcissistic stake in projects of this kind is as dangerous to successful results as in individual or family treatment. The social worker's aim must be the development of the

not his own self interests.

An unusually perceptive social work recruitment aide who worked in East Harlem for three months this summer, placed in the final report of his experience to the Recruitment Committee, the following observations of the project of neighborhood conservation, a program aimed at improving in a geographically bound area, the privately owned residential properties adjoining public housing. He characterizes it correctly as one aimed, not only at conserving and improving housing, but at the conservation and improvement of all of the neighborhood's resources, the most important of which is the people who live there. "The first thing we do," he says, when working with a building or a block, "is to interview all of the people," the tenants and owners alike. The purpose of the interviews is not alone to get objective data, but to learn the attitudes of the people about themselves, about their own building, improvements they would like to see accomplished, and how they feel about their neighbors, their block and their neighborhood. "Tangible results must be gained," he explains, not only because they are needed, "but so the people gain confidence, not in us, but in themselves." - "People must be helped to learn to do for themselves even though it may not be the most eloquent or expedient" of changes. In the end, and I quote, "This is truly the most rewarding - for it is only through their strength and unity that anything lasting and worthwhile is achieved."

He goes on then to describe an incident in the life of an East Harlem block organization which contained both tenants and owners and in whose meetings he participated. The majority of the residential tenants were Puerto Rican and Negro, and of the owners and merchants, Italian. A study of the block had revealed an overwhelming interest in and need for a supervised play street for the summer months. In one building alone over 50 children, between the ages of 3 and 12 years, were discovered. Initially, the owners and merchants although raising some questions and objections had "gone along," and the block group proceeded to obtain the approval of "a play street" by the city fathers. This type of "play street" involves closing the street to through traffic from the hours of one o'clock to eight P.M. and the removal of parked cars. During these hours, workers from the Police Athletic League work with the youngsters of all ages on sports, games, arts and crafts and on occasion take them on trips. The full impact of this had not "hit" the owners and merchants until the "play street" opened. Within two days of its beginning, the latter were circulating a petition to have it closed. "Sides were divided along ethnic lines" says our aide, "not (according to the issues), right or wrong, good or bad." Among the petitioners were those with legitimate complaints and those for whom the "play street" created only some personal inconvenience. With the help of our staff, the executive committee of the organization called an emergency meeting of the entire block - tenants, merchants, owners. Leaflets explaining the issues were distributed and on a sultry, hot July night, 60% of the buildings on the block were represented by the attendants. Name calling and deep prejudices were aired by many before the followers could respond to the leaderships' search for reasonable compromises and a final sound and acceptable solution. Of considerable significance was a speech in defense of the "play street" by the war lord leader of "The Elegants" -- a well known local gang of teenagers and young adults-- speech which was practically drowned out by the cheers and applause of his fellow gang members." The aide notes, astutely, that "besides helping to retain the "play street," these vociferous

young people were in fact helping themselves." That night for them, was probably the first real therapy they had ever experienced, for something concrete was won without the loss of so much as a drop of blood." "At the end of the summer the 'play street' was characterized by all who knew it, as an unqualified success." "Yes," he concludes, "I learned much this summer about social work, New York City and its people, but most of all I learned about myself. He had changed his school program to prepare for social work so that he could learn with his mind what he had experienced through his observations and participation in practice.

This young man starts far ahead, for without his being fully aware of it, he really knows that "a leader is best where people hardly know he exists...but of a good leader, when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say, 'We did this ourselves.'" (Lao-Tse)